SEMINAR
REPORT

DDO SERIES:

AUTHENTICATION OF AGENT SOURCES

CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF INTELLIGENCE

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

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CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF INTELLIGENCE

9 August 1976

Seminar on Authentication of Agent Sources of Information

Is it necessary to introduce more structure, including perhaps Directorate-wide criteria or formal guidelines into the agent authentication process? This was the basic question posed to some 35 intelligence officers primarily from the DDO, but including representatives of OMS, OTS and the Office of Security, who gathered recently in OTR for an afternoon seminar on the subject of agent authentication.[1] The group consensus was decidedly against set criteria-- circumstances and interests in each agent case are different and set criteria would tend not to be an aid, but a straight- jacket. Still, improvement in understanding and attention to the process of authentication across the Directorate is needed, according to the seminar participants. It should be tackled in two ways: more focused training and more involvement in the process by other officers in the intelligence chain (reports officers and analysts, etc.) in addition to the case officer.

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[1] The seminar was one in a series sponsored by the Center for the Study of Intelligence designed to be of interest to the Operations Directorate. A list of attendees at the session is attached to this report. An issues paper on the subject was circulated before the seminar was held; a copy is attached to this report.

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Training Needs

According to several seminar participants there is a lack of attention to the principle that the authentication process is a continuing obligation and should be a continuing focus of concern by the collectors. One way to overcome this would be to give more attention in training to the need to take all the applicable steps in the process as a matter of routine. As we do it now, the training for case officers does not include instruction in any formal, systematized authentication process as such, although trainees do get a two-hour block on some basic testing procedures. One reason for this lack of emphasis is the absence of written doctrinal material for training that sets forth a generally applicable, logical sequence of steps for authentication. Case histories, including nitty-gritty details of most of the steps in the process, are also lacking.

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-2-

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A similar need for more training and familiarization was voiced in connection with psychological assessments. In response to the criticism that the psychological examinations frequently seem to result in assessment language so hedged as to be relatively useless as an authentication tool, the experts in the field contended that results could be improved if more care and preparation went into carefully outlining the objectives for each individual case being examined and in giving the experts proper data on the agent so that refined and useful questions could be developed.

-3-

One-week courses are available to case officers on the use

25X1A   of the [   ] an intelligence and personality measurement system.

Apart from the functional aspects of training, there were some attitudinal issues raised. One concerned the dynamics of the collection process, which some participants viewed as now favoring numbers of recruitments and numbers of reports from these recruitments rather than quality. The result is to build in a fear on the part of case officers of ruining the prospects of a recruitment and reporting operation by being too strict about authentication procedures. This can be the opening wedge for fabrications. Again, an educational effort might help reverse this attitude on the part of case officers by assuring them that the Agency is vitally interested and willing to reward a serious and responsible effort to cut off marginal reporting operations, because they will not stand strict authentication procedures including a close examination of the value and accuracy of the information. Indeed one participant suggested our training include the criteria used in journalism schools for proof of access and accuracy--where libel laws make the matter a serious one.

Other Links in the Chain

Several participants saw a weakness in the authentication process due to the lack of a central, responsible individual

-4-

in each Division charged with overseeing authentication.
Some present said they believed the case officer should
be the responsible person. In the EA Division system--
the only formalized authentication process required by
any Division--the COS is designated as the responsible
person. At least two participants questioned whether there
was not a useful separation in authentication procedures to
be observed in terms of the responsibility for authenticating
a source (agent) and the authentication of his information.
But others expressed the belief that the two are really
inseparable and should not be isolated. In denied and
semi-denied areas, where access to the agent is highly
restricted, there is naturally more dependence upon examina-
tion of the information reported than in accessible and
hospitable areas where the agent is in regular, unhurried
contact with his case officer. But it was the general view
that an education process is necessary in the Directorate
to help develop understanding of the need for, and the
practice of, bringing all elements into the authentication
process that properly have a role. This includes the case
officer, the Headquarters desk officers and reports officers,
the analysts, [   ] and the psychological
assessment officers. The relationship might be expressed
as follows:

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--the case officer: He is in most direct contact
with the agent or prospective agent. He must
be aware of the need to call in the other
players in the process of authentication and
to do his utmost to use all the tools available
that can reasonably be applied to his agent as
part of the process. Ideally, he should prepare
each step in the most careful and meticulous
manner, and not feel inhibited from finding
negative as well as positive elements in his
case. There should be no opprobrium attached
to uncovering negative elements.

--the Headquarters desk officer: He should play
a review role in each major development con-
nected with the operation to assure that the
case officer is not overlooking significant
authentication aspects of the case and is
properly calling upon the support available
at Headquarters.

--the reports officer: He should assure that
before an agent is "pitched" in a recruitment
attempt there is really a potential that the
agent can, or is likely to in the future, supply
valuable, needed information. All too often
this vital link is not established before

recruitment, and the reports officer is asked
to supply requirements for a recruited agent
who does not have very valuable access for what
the Agency really needs. This leads to demanding
the unattainable from an agent and in turn creates
a pressure on the agent to fabricate.

One participant in the seminar, who has worked
as a reports officer with over 1000 agent sources
of information, said he had seldom seen a reports
officer have any power in the authentication pro-
cess vis-a-vis the operation officer. Yet the
reports officer who knows the operational back-
ground to the case should be in the best position
to evaluate the agent's information both as to
accuracy and value. Aside from the obvious
measuring of value, regular checks on agent
information should be a normal part of the
reports officer work. A formal system to
accomplish the latter was recommended for LA
Division at one time but has not been implemented.
If the information provided by the agent is neither
accurate, nor needed, the operation should be
halted. Tests of the accuracy and value of the
information must be met with every agent source,
no matter how many other steps in authentication
have or have not been accomplished.

--<u>the analyst</u>: He can assist in the evaluation
of the information to assure that it meets the
two essential criteria mentioned above. But
most analysts need a considerably better under-
standing than they now possess of how to be
more usefully critical and challenging of the
information provided in clandestine service
reporting. The seminar participants disagreed
on how much information the Operations Directorate
should provide the analyst in soliciting his coop-
eration in the evaluation of material. This led
to a criticism of the source descriptions affixed
to reports and to some comment that the Operations
Directorate should educate the analyst on the use
of source descriptions and what they really mean.
Several participants suggested that a separate
seminar in this series would be worthwhile on
the "theory and use" of source descriptions.

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--the psychological advisory officers: In many

operations one or more of the variety of assess-

ments which can be made with the assistance of

the Behavioral Activities Branch are useful in

the authentication process. But there was dis-

agreement on the importance of probing agent

motivation by psychological assessments as

part of the authentication process. One view

was that motivation was usually too obscure to

be useful in authentication. Others pointed

out that it could help in establishing the

extent of the bias in the reporting product

of the agent. Changes in motivation, which

can have a profound effect on the entire

operation, can be reflected in a continuing

series of psychological assessments.
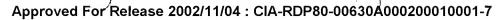
The Importance of Definitions

It was clear to a number of the participants that some

of our difficulties in authentication are traceable to a lack

of uniform understanding of the meaning of elements in the

process. Most of the seminar participants would agree with the following treatment of key terms:

<u>Authentication</u>: The process, to be useful and correct, is never completed and there is really no such thing as an authenticat<u>ed</u> source. The authentication of a source is a continuous process engaged in during the entire period of the agent's employment.

<u>Agent/Collaborator</u>: An agent is a reporting source who is controlled in the classic sense following a formal recruitment and who is in a formalized contractual basis with the Agency with some remuneration. Authentication of such agents should fully engage all the applicable steps in the process. On the other hand, collaborators, such as some agents of influence, high officials who have limited ideological grounds to cooperate as a friend, etc., may constitute a growing proportion of our intelligence sources. They are not so tightly "controlled" as the agent and may not have formalized contractual agreements with the Agency. As a result, they may not be getting as much authentication processing as their intelligence product should require.

<u>Tests/Assessments</u>: Many operational tests are just that, and are passed or failed by the agent. On the other hand, the word "test" tends to be used when what is really meant is an assessment--which is not a black/white process. Assessments of all kinds can be useful even if at first glance they tend to produce a negative image for the agent.

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Criteria and Guidelines: While there was a general reaction against establishing any formal system of rigid criteria on authentication which would be required and reported to Headquarters, a number of seminar participants saw the utility of developing a systematized set of guidelines (the individual steps of which were not compulsory, but were comprehensive) as a management tool to focus attention on the process and on the steps that could be used, and to enable training in their application to be systematized. This would be an encouragement to good tradecraft.

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CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF INTELLIGENCE

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Factors Related to the Authentication of Agent

Sources of Information

Do We Need Criteria?

There is considerable disagreement among case officers
as to whether criteria of general world-wide applicability
can or should be developed. Some have expressed grave
reservations about any attempt to create "dogma," fearing
it would be mechanically applied and blind us to important
individual differences in cases. One strong demonstration
that general criteria might work is provided in an article
in "Studies in Intelligence"[1] in which there is a striking
parallelism shown between the complaints and needs of two
such culturally different agents as a German and a Korean.
On the other hand, there are strong arguments against
universal criteria in the thrust of three other articles,[2]
each about recruiting agents of different nationalities: a

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Soviet, a Chinese, and a Libyan. These articles suggest that the problems typical of dealing with these three nationalities are so different as to make similar authentication criteria impractical.

The most detailed work that has been done on the subject of authentication of agents was produced in the context of the Agency's mission in Vietnam and was tailored mainly to that unique situation. This literature has found its way into background reading for the operational training mission

25X1A of the Office of Training [   ] although it is (probably correctly) not a formal part of the required reading or instruction. Despite the care with which this work was undertaken and the direct tailoring to the Vietnamese situation, experiences in Vietnam do not suggest that the effort was very successful in avoiding the recruitment and use of agents later found to be fabricators. The core concepts of this effort were converted into a guideline for the process of authenticating agents for all of the East Asia Division in 1973 and it has been applicable there since. What experiences has EA Division had in applying the criteria in Stations other than Vietnam? Have certain of the criteria proved more valid than others and have some criteria proved inapplicable in other Far East countries?

Normal Processes of Authentication:

The scattered literature available on the subject tends to focus on some generally applicable steps in the process

of authenticating an agent source. The first group of such
steps is research: the identification of and development of
biographics on the individual, his documentation, the estab-
lishing of his access, the determination of what useful
information he can provide, the inter-agency and local source
checks, the Provisional Operational Approval (POA), the
Personal Record Questionnaire (PRQ) part I and part II.
Are any of these dispensable in the process of authentication?
It has been said that the PRQ's have never been revised,
despite the Agency's penchant for updating all its forms.
The PRQ does not ask what steps in authentication have been
completed. Does this document need changes, and should it
contain a check list of some of the generally desirable steps
in the authentication process?

All case officers seem to concur that there is no
substitute for the case officer's thorough knowledge of the
subject matter upon which the source is going to report, and
of the agent and his personality in the fullest detail. Some
case officers argue strongly that <u>all</u> that is needed is full,
detailed and perceptive knowledge of the agent as a human
being, and that no set criteria for authentication are useful.
Is this belief widespread in the Agency and is it a well
founded view?

A third aspect of the process of authentication of an
agent is usually the evaluation of the information the agent

produces. The evaluation can take many forms from checking against known information, checking against what other sources report, comparing with photography or evidence available in COMINT, to submitting the information for the judgment of analysts in Headquarters. Which of these or others are particularly useful? How well have the judgments of analysts in Headquarters served the purpose?

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Psychological Approaches:

On the scale of popularity with case officers, the series of psychological tests used in authenticating agents appears

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Such tests as those sponsored
25X1A by the Behavioral Activities Branch, [   ] the
graphological analysis approach, and finally the analysis
of the content of the PRQ part III, are all part of the
psychological group of tests sometimes used in authentica-
tion. There are case officers who find the resulting analysis
of such tests entirely too inconclusive to be of much use.
Still others believe they are totally useless and only provide
the case officer with other ways of stating what he already does
or should know about his agent or potential agent. Are the
results of these psychological analyses too hedged in their
language and would more unequivocal language be really useful?

There are a number of complaints and criticisms about
our general operational approach to authenticating agents
which may be worth airing in search of better methodologies.
The most common of these criticisms is that there has been
an alleged dangerous overemphasis upon recruitment in recent
years. There is disagreement as to why this is dangerous,
however. Some say that it encourages carelessness with the
proper steps of authentication (or worse, their falsification);
that contact reports are never written with firmly expressed
doubts about the authenticity of a potential recruit. Has
our training and supervisory approach instilled in the case
officer the injudiciousness of this step when a healthy
skepticism of agents is almost universally recognized as
desirable? What is causing this? Another reason cited for
the alleged danger of overemphasis upon recruitment is that

it has simply failed to produce the quality of agent desirable. The charge is that our quality agents have not, in fact, been recruited by "gung ho" case officers with large numbers of recruitments to their credit. Still another explanation of the alleged danger is that it stresses the value of the "pitcher" (recruiter) over the value of the "extractor" (agent handler), placing the importance of the latter too low and thus undermining the intelligence product.

Critical Points:

Some have noted that there are several critical points involved in any vigorous authentication process. One is the danger of probing the agent's motivation to the point of creating agent hostility. A second is pressing the agent to produce to the point that he is frightened to admit he cannot get some piece of information which is a prelude to fabrication. There are also those case officers who believe we have taught and continue to teach entirely too much to our agents, thus creating throughout the world a cadre of well-trained agents who know all too well how to make fabrication believable. Is this a generally shared view? Still another danger is seen in too much quantifying of everything, in terms of numbers of agents recruited, numbers of reports turned in, numerical value of the reports, grade averages of agents, projects, stations, branches, and divisions, all of which, it is charged, leaves hollow and empty the real

value of the information collected. Is this a legitimate

criticism? Finally, a danger of particular consequence for

those engaged in hard-target recruitment is the frequent

problem of shortness of time available before a target

returns to his homeland. This can lead to the elimination

of testing and authentication steps that would otherwise be

taken.

Fabrication:

Fabrications are an endemic problem with which the

Agency will have to deal so long as there is a market for

intelligence information. Little change in thinking about

this problem has taken place since the classic piece done on

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the subject[3] in the 1950's [   ] We have

apparently found from experience that some agents start out

as fabricators, but most of them seem to lose their access

or run out of information at some stage and then turn to

fabrication. Does this really hold true, and if so, does

it imply that we are pushing the agent too hard to get what

he can't get, and/or training him so well he can invent what

we want? Is fabrication always due to the delinquency of a

case officer? Most fabrication appears to be uncovered by

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25X1A   [3]"Fabrications, Paper Mills and Imposters," (July 1970
version is in OSL-2047A), [   ]
wrote the basic piece in the first half of the 1950's.

case officers in their operational dealings with the agent,
rather than by intelligence analysts pouring over the reported
information. Is this generally the case, and if so, why are so
few fabrications tripped up on the basis of the information
itself? Is the Agency failing to provide careful enough
scrutiny of the contents of its intelligence reports for
fabrication, and if so, where should this responsibility lie,
with the reports officer or the DDI analyst?

Control and Motivation:

The issue of control and motivation figures largely in
any consideration of authentication of an agent and may be
worth discussion at the seminar. Most case officers believe
a monetary motivation is best for control purposes because
this type of agent motivation is usually the easiest to
handle and exploit. The least popular control seems to be
the use of coercion; few agents controlled by coercion have
ever been successfully run for long. Between these extremes
fall other possible elements of control and motivation. The
ideological motivation is very common, but may be becoming
increasingly difficult to handle in an age when U.S. foreign
policy changes (detente) make re-recruitment repeatedly
necessary, and not always successful. Personal security,
religion, shared values with an international basis,[4]

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[4]
  Anti-atomic warfare, disarmament, anti-biological/chemical
warfare, ecology, polution, and economic interdependence are
concepts that would fit into this category.

adventurism, and finally, "any motivation that may exist" have all been mentioned. Is control and motivation undergoing fundamental changes as the U.S. becomes a less popular moral symbol with conflicts with the underdeveloped world in which many of our operations are now run? Are adventurism and other motivations likely to increase in importance for our agents, and if so what does this mean for control?

Source Descriptions:

There is no very clearly defined point at which the appropriate officers decide to circulate the intelligence information provided by a source while describing that source as untested, or "reliability not established." There is also no agreement on when the step should be taken to describe the source as fairly reliable, and from there to graduate him to more confident assessments. In fact, there is an interesting division of opinion as to whether the information or the source is the most important thing being authenticated. One former division reports chief believed that if the source was trustworthy and discriminatory about his own sub-sources of information and careful about what he passed on to us, then the information--regardless of what it was--should be authenticated as reliable because it came through a reliable channel of acquisition. Others believe that some agents may well be incapable of discrimination about the information that comes into their possession, and are mere couriers or

conveyors of a volume of information from which we must choose
for our best intelligence. There are obvious gradients between
these extremes. Are there useful guides to points in the
process of agent authentication when certain steps in dissemina-
tion of intelligence from an agent should be taken? Are such
guides generally applicable to all operations around the world?

There are probably other topics of significance in the
authentication of agents which have not been mentioned in
this paper, and a discussion of these will be welcomed at the
seminar.